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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
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SUBJECT: VALLE DE CAUCA: CLEAN ELECTIONS EXPECTED DESPITE  
WORRIES OVER NARCO INFLUENCE

Classified By: Political Counselor John Creamer - Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) Summary. We expect peaceful elections in most races in Valle de Cauca, but there is widespread concern that drug money may be behind some campaigns. The FARC is unlikely to disrupt elections, but is reportedly sponsoring candidates around Cali. New criminal groups and ex-paramilitaries maintain a relatively small presence, and are not involved in politics. The GOC will provide security at all 240 polling places, and is protecting threatened candidates, investigating campaign finance violations, and randomly transferring election officials to prevent fraud. End summary.

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Valle Background: Drugs and Money  
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¶2. (U) Valle de Cauca remains an important link in the most active drug corridor in Colombia. The FARC, drug cartels, and new criminal groups move product from coca-growing regions in Meta through Valle and out through the Pacific coast port of Buenaventura. All have tried to buy politicians and other public officials to ease the flow of drugs in the region. Comparing the system to "The Godfather," Monsignor Juan Zarasti (whose predecessor in Cali, Msr. Durate, was assassinated by the cartels on March 16, 2002), told us the cartels historically attempted to buy journalists, police, and local officials in a position to assist "by looking the other way."

¶3. (C) Governor Angelino Garzon, Cali Mayor Ramiro Tafur, and Catholic church, Police, and National Registrar officials told us drug money may be behind a number of campaigns in the Department (mostly in northern Valle). There are also rumors of vote buying and dirty money connected to the gubernatorial campaign of Juan Carlos Abadia. Abadia, 28, has already been a Valle deputy, Cali councilman, and president of the Cali city council. His father, Carlos Herney Abadia, went to jail in the President Samper narco campaign financing scandal in the 1990s, and has since worked with Senator Juan Carlos Martinez (Convergencia Ciudadania) to build a strong political machine. Abadia junior told us he is not responsible for the sins of his father and denied any links to vote buying or narcotraffickers. Garzon, Tafur and Police officials told us they were not aware of any investigations against candidate Abadia.

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FARC: "All Forms of Struggle"  
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¶4. (C) The FARC is unlikely to disrupt the election, but the group maintains a strong presence in Valle. The 30th Front and the "Miller Perdomo" and "Manuel Cepeda Vargas" urban columns operate in the highlands around Cali and in Buenaventura. General Jesus Gomez, Police Commander in Valle, told us the FARC historically did not attempt attacks on election day, but would likely harass voters or set off small bombs in mountainous zones to gain some media attention. Zaraste said that in rural areas, the FARC run their own candidates. The group then extorts funds and information on security force operations from small town officials.

¶5. (C) Ricardo Salazar (Colombia Democratica), leading candidate for mayor in Florida, told us the FARC is running its own candidate for mayor--Wilson Lulico of the Indigenous Movement. The FARC is demanding that the Florida and Pradera municipalities "demilitarized" as a condition for talks on a possible humanitarian exchange of FARC-held hostages for FARC prisoners in Colombian jails. Salazar said mayors in areas of FARC influence are normally forced to give 10 percent of the city budget (USD 5-8,000 per month for Florida) to the FARC through fake salaries or contracts. Salazar appealed for international observation of the elections to avoid FARC coercion and fraud. He hopes the increased security provided by the recent arrival of a military "High Mountain" battalion would allow him to resist FARC demands, if elected.

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Threat from Ex-Paras Minimal  
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¶6. (C) Monsignor Zarasti told us that perhaps the only positive element of the FARC and narco influence in Valle is that emerging armed groups and ex-paramilitaries have a minimal presence --except in Buenaventura--and are not involved in politics. Narcos cooperate with some former-paras near the end of the drug distribution chain in Buenaventura and fight over drug routes with the FARC, but are not a threat in most of the department.

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GOC Efforts Against Violence and Fraud  
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¶7. (C) Despite the drug and FARC threats to the Valle political system, most contacts expect a vast majority of races to be, as Zaraste put it, "more or less clean and peaceful." The GOC will provide security for 100 percent of the 240 polling places in Valle (176 urban and 76 rural) for the first time in memory. Police are providing 24/7 protection to 111 political headquarters, and 18 candidates have full-time security details.

¶8. (C) The Registrar and Police are working to prevent fraud. In September, national election authorities randomly transferred key local election officials to other regions to avoid corruption, replacing them with officials from other parts of the country. The Valle Representative from the National Registrar's office confirmed that the Valle Departmental Registrar immediately resigned his position when told of his imminent transfer and went to work on the Abadia gubernatorial campaign. The Registrar and police are also investigating possible violations of campaign spending limits. Major Juan Rodriguez, intelligence chief for the Valle Police, told us he expects to seek indictments against drug-backed front companies involved in campaigns, though he admitted that the candidates insulated themselves against direct contact with their illegal backers.

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Key Race 1: Cali Mayor = Good News  
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¶9. (C) The next mayor of Cali will be either Fransisco "Kiko" Lloreda (independent--with Conservative roots), or

Jorge Ivan Ospina (independent--with Polo roots). Lloreda, who unsuccessfully ran for mayor of Cali in 1999 and 2003, led for most of the race but was tied with Ospina in an October 20 poll. Both Lloreda (whose family owns the El Espectador newspaper), and Ospina (a respected physician whose father was an M-19 rebel leader) are widely considered honest with solid backgrounds to manage the USD 700 million Cali annual budget and 14,000 city employees. Still, local election officials announced a preliminary investigation against Ospina for possible vote buying after taxi drivers in Cali were each offered USD 15 and a raffle ticket for a new car to promote Ospina's campaign.

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Key Race 2: Valle Governor = "Depressing"  
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¶10. (C) Barring major surprise, Abadia will be the next governor of Valle. Polls show him with wide leads. Three others, Fabiola Perdomo (whose husband was a Valle Deputy killed by the FARC in June), Fransisco Murgueitio (Conservative--ex Senator), and Maria del Socorro Bustamante (Liberal) have consistently polled 10-12 percent support. The three underdogs failed in their attempt to unite behind a single candidate. Governor Garzon, who in his term has increased annual Department income from USD 350 million to 650 million, reduced debt from USD 330 million to 160 million, and expanded annual public investment from USD 21 million to 408 million in 2006, told us he was "depressed" over the prospect of an Abadia victory. "He will have to pay back his supporters," he said.

Brownfield